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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LILONGWE 000596

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PINR](#) [KCOR](#) [ECON](#) [EFIN](#) [MI](#)

SUBJECT: MUNYENYEMBE ELECTED SPEAKER, MUTHARIKA OPENS
PARLIAMENT

REF: A. LILONGWE 559

[1](#)B. LILONGWE 457

[1](#)C. LILONGWE 451

Classified By: Pol/Econ Officer Peter W. Lord, reasons 1.5 (b/d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (SBU) With a narrow margin of victory, United Democratic Front (UDF) MP Rodwell Munyenyerembe was elected Speaker of the National Assembly on June 28. The House also elected First and Second Deputies, both of whom are pro-UDF. President Bingu wa Mutharika, in his first address to Parliament on June 29, sounded his now familiar refrain of moving the nation "from poverty to prosperity." Echoing themes made at his inaugural address, Mutharika explained how each ministry will play its part in his administration's goal of reforming the public, private, agricultural, and civil service sectors. Well received by most Malawians, Mutharika's policy statements have invoked a "wait-and-see" attitude from political commentators and the donor community. (Bio information on Munyenyerembe begins in paragraph 6.) END SUMMARY.

MUNYENYEMBE ELECTED SPEAKER

[1](#)2. (SBU) In a tangible demonstration of the ruling United Democratic Front's (UDF) slim working majority in Parliament, UDF MP Rodwell Munyenyerembe was elected Speaker of the National Assembly on June 28, defeating Malawi Congress Party (MCP) MP Louis Chimango 99 to 83 (reftel A). Republican Party (RP) MP Esther Chilenje was elected First Deputy Speaker, and independent MP Jones Chingola was elected Second Deputy Speaker. All three support the ruling UDF's "government of national unity." (NOTE: During the leadership elections in the 193-member house, two parliamentarians were absent, and eight seats were vacant pending by-elections. In the vote for the Speaker, one ballot was spoiled and declared "null and void." END NOTE.)

MUTHARIKA'S NOW FAMILIAR REFRAIN

[1](#)3. (SBU) On June 29 President Bingu wa Mutharika began his first address to Parliament by carefully listing campaign promises he has kept, including reduction of the size of the cabinet, his administration's focus on economic reform, and transfer of the presidency and ministries to Lilongwe (from Malawi's commercial capital, Blantyre). In addition to reminding the nation that he is keeping his campaign promises, Mutharika reprised familiar themes from his inaugural address (reftel C) and his first meeting with the donor heads-of-mission (reftel B). Highlighting his administration's self-dubbed tag-line "from poverty to prosperity," Mutharika focused his remarks on how the ministries will fulfill his goal of reforming the public, private, agricultural, and civil service sectors.

[1](#)4. (SBU) The only comment to elicit applause from the assembled government officials was a reiteration of his "zero-tolerance policy" against corruption.

COMMENT

[1](#)5. (C) Mutharika has gotten good mileage out of his current message, and it is generally well received by Malawians. Political commentators and the donor community, who remember similar promises by newly-elected President Bakili Muluzi in 1994, have adopted a "wait-and-see" attitude toward Mutharika's policies. Mutharika's reforms come with a price, and his administration will have to balance implementation of those reforms with a need for strict fiscal discipline. END COMMENT.

BIO INFORMATION: Rodwell Munyenyerembe

[1](#)6. (C) Originally an educator, Munyenyerembe has had a long political career, serving in several ministerial positions both before and after Malawi's transition to multi-party democracy. Once among the most active, intelligent, and hardworking ministers, Munyenyerembe's influence and drive have

diminished significantly with age. Munyenyeembe re-gained his parliamentary constituency in the 2004 elections and was elected Speaker of the National Assembly on June 28, 2004. He is largely perceived to be a loyalist of former President (and current chair of the ruling United Democratic Front) Bakili Muluzi, which is likely the reason the party selected him for the Speakership.

Munyenyembe in Multiparty Democracy

17. (C) Munyenyeembe was a founding member of the Alliance for Democracy (AFORD) opposition party and was elected to Parliament in Malawi's first multiparty elections in 1994. He was unanimously elected Speaker when Parliament met for the first time in late June 1994. He has since distanced himself from AFORD and ran as an independent candidate in June 1999 and was defeated.

18. (C) After losing his parliamentary constituency, then-President Muluzi appointed him Minister of State for Presidential Affairs. He was later appointed Minister of Defense, where he remained through the end of Muluzi's second and final term as President. He was not very active as Minister of Defense and had little engagement with the Malawi Defense Force.

19. (SBU) At the UDF convention in August 2003, Munyenyeembe, the convention's organizer, was defeated in his bid for the Second Vice Presidency of the party. In the 2004 parliamentary elections, he contested and re-won his Chitipia parliamentary constituency.

Under the Banda Regime

10. (C) Munyenyeembe headed several ministries in Banda's government from 1963 to 1977 and represented Malawi at the UN General Assembly in 1975 and at the OAU in 1976. His political banishment occurred in 1977 when he was first "transferred" from his position as Malawi Congress Party (MCP) Secretary General and Administrative Secretary to serve as Minister of Education, and then later he was odd-man-out in a cabinet reshuffle which, according to some, was staged to facilitate his exit from Government. Republican Party president Gwanda Chakuamba and Malawi Congress Party president John Tembo were allegedly involved in Munyenyeembe's ouster.

Personal Data

11. (C) A northerner from Chitipa District, Munyenyeembe was born in 1936. He studied at Livingstonia and then at Domasi Teacher Training College, before beginning his career as a primary school teacher. He earned a certificate for teaching the deaf from Manchester Metropolitan University in the UK in 1966 and a technical certificate in audiometrics from the University of London in 1967. Munyenyeembe retains his interest in education for the deaf. He is a devout Roman Catholic, is married, and has 12 children.
RASPOLIC